

***Alma* Stop**

#26 A Local Lifeline

In this episode, we'll consider the history and significance of the scow schooner *Alma*.

Compared with the majestic *Balclutha*, *Alma* is a homebody. Built specifically for a hard-working life on San Francisco Bay, she has sailed local inland channels since 1891. Like modern flatbed freight trucks, she was designed to carry cargo. Before construction of the famous bridges of San Francisco Bay, *Alma* and hundreds of other scow schooners used waterways as highways to connect isolated communities of the Bay Area. A century ago in the town of Petaluma, residents would welcome *Alma* with excitement, for she was a lifeline to another world. What news and goods did she bring from San Francisco?

San Francisco Bay scow schooners date back to the gold rush. In the days when the city ran on horses instead of cars, hay was as important as oil is today. *Alma* supplied Bay Area communities not only with hay, but also with other essential food and shelter, including grain, bricks, and lumber. San Franciscans would greet *Alma* with good cheer, for she might be carrying fresh eggs for breakfast from Petaluma.

Scow schooners also connected families and friends in more direct ways. The scows were sometimes used for festive parties with music, dancing, picnicking and swimming. Alma Peterson has pleasant memories of such special days at Paradise Cove, north of San Francisco, "We'd take the husbands and the wives and the kids and old friends. We'd get over there and drink beer."

An estimated 400 scow schooners were built on San Francisco Bay, and *Alma* is the last of her kind. She still connects the communities of the Bay Area by participating in local maritime events and celebrations. San Francisco Maritime National Historical Park preserves *Alma* as a living monument to the tradition of local maritime commerce.